

UNIVERSIDAD DEL SALVADOR
FACULTAD DE FILOSOFÍA, HISTORIA Y
LETRAS

DOCTORADO EN LENGUAS MODERNAS



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Buenos Aires, april 2011

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all the people who helped me from the academic and the human point of view.

Blanca María Saucedo de Rizzo, the director of this PhD Thesis, for her constant support, enthusiasm and qualified guidance.

Silvana Kuskunov, the language tutor, for her encouragement, the careful reading of the manuscript and her valuable suggestions.

My family for their assistance and patience to stand by me.

ABSTRACT

This research explores contemporary *Mapuche* literary works produced in Argentina looking for identity traits which distinguish them from others.

Ethnic identity and literature are studied for this purpose as well as the aborigines' view. As a result, the following traits are selected and examined: origin, language, religion, tradition and the concept of space. The white man's influence is also considered.

Texts from different genres are analysed and the constituent traits of their identity found.

Key Words: *Mapuche* – Argentina – identity – literature – traits



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INTRODUCTION

We are going through a distinctive period in history—post modernity – which has allowed globalization come into existence due to the growing interdependence of national economies in the whole world. New technologies have changed the communicative importance and immediacy of available information. Now we belong to the global village or community. Cultural homogenization and pluralism are discussed and analyzed. The world seems to be expanding the same as culture, though, at the same time, this situation has brought up a defensive attitude against this universality. A growing localism and ethnicity have become important issues. Human beings feel identified with or part of an ethnic group and excluded from others. Identity begins to be reasserted, especially by aborigines who live in the American continent. They are fighting for their right to be different from the rest. They are trying not to forget their roots. Their objective is to keep their identity safe or to recover it.

In Argentina, the *Pilaga*, *Toba*, *Wichi*, *Guaraní* and *Mapuche* groups, among others, have been working hard towards this objective, for a long time. We have chosen to work on one of these groups: the *Mapuche* people and we have focused our research on their literature as a means to express their identity. Why?

The Problem

There has been a great development of *Mapuche* literature in Chile and the consequent research on this subject if we compare it with Argentina, especially in poetry. Elicura Chihuailaf, Leonel Lienlaf, Rayen Kvyeh, Lorenzo Aillapán, Jaime Huenún, Jaqueline Caniguán, Graciela Huinao, among others, have made important contributions as poets to *Mapuche* and Chilean literature. They have published some books in Chile and in Europe and their poems have also been published in magazines and anthologies.

Analysis of their work has not been as popular as with the 'white's' literature probably due to the ethnocentrism which prevails in all fields, also in the literary studies. However, there have been interesting works on Chilean *Mapuche* literature and on the above mentioned poets who are being studied at the university; lectures are given in annual congresses and criticism is available even in newspapers.

After having the opportunity of reading some of this literature, we started wondering if the *Mapuche* had produced any literature in our country. The first short stories and legends we read were offered to us by Gregorio Alvarez, Bertha Koessler-Ilg and César Fernández. They were written and/or told in Argentina. Feeling immediately attracted by the beauty, mystery and naivety of these stories and considering these authors' love and respect for *Mapuche* aborigines and their writings which were evident in their commentaries made us wish to read more and aroused some questions:

- Are they producing literary works at present?
- Can these texts be considered *Mapuche*?
- Which traits distinguish them from others?

Having these questions in mind, we set to carry out this research in order to find the answers we were looking for.

The situation, as compared with that of Chile, is rather different in our country. This is the reason why we have focused our research on the *Mapuche*¹ who live in Argentina. To find contemporary literature written by Argentine *Mapuche* is quite difficult - a titan's task as people say - either because there is very little production or because it is almost impossible to get it published. It would be immoral to ask the aborigines to devote more time to literature because, as Catherine Saintoul says, in the situation of illiteracy, exploitation and misery in which they are immersed, their time and energy are absorbed in surviving and little is left for writing². As a consequence, to find analysis of their literary works is also complicated. Little is published and with a considerable effort. Besides, most of the material produced is scattered on the internet sites, a fact which makes access hard. However, we were able to collect data which we offer to the ones interested in the subject.

Literary Review

The investigations on *Mapuche* literature have been quite recent in our country. Roberto Lehmann-Nitsche was one of the first to study this theme: *El diluvio según los araucanos de la pampa* (1919) and *El viejo Tatrapai de los araucanos* (1928-1937). Berta koessler-Ilg did a very important research though she has been criticized for the method she used for collecting the aborigines' stories as she preferred to rely on her memory rather than take down notes. Most of her work has not been published yet but two famous books are: *Cuentan los araucanos* (1954) and *Tradiciones araucanas* (1962). Berta Elena Vidal de Battini, compiled a great number of stories and legends from different provinces, some of them have been produced by *Mapuche* people. They were published in *Cuentos y leyendas populares de Argentina* (1980-1995). Rodolfo Casamiquela was interested in literature which is sung (*Romanceada* and *Tayül*). He published totemic songs and Araucanian dances with their music notes. (1958-1966). Gregorio Alvarez published different texts in *El*

¹ We do not use the plural forms in *Mapuche* words in this thesis as these aborigines do not use them.

² Catherine SAINTOUL, *Racismo, Etnocentrismo y Literatura. La novela indigenista andina*, Bs. As., Ediciones Del Sol, 1988, p.185

tronco de oro (1969) and *Donde Estuvo El Paraíso* (1984). Lucía Golluscio (1978), Ana Fernandez Garay (1982, 1991, 1993) and Perla Golbert (1975) focus their work mostly on linguistic aspects of phonology and morphology. They have worked on *epeu*, *tayul* and *ulkantum*. Orlando M. Punzi has investigated the war between the Argentine Army and the aborigines (*Historia del desierto*, 1983) including texts of different literary genres. In *Relatos y Romanceadas Mapuches* (1996) and in *Cuentan los Mapuches* (1995), César Fernández informs us about oral literature in general and *Mapuche* literature in particular before offering a compilation of stories which are being told by the *Mapuche* at present. It is important to mention that the author includes information about names of people, places and dates when these stories were told.

With the arrival of the new century, the scope of study was expanded as literature started to be studied not only from the linguistic, but also from the psychological, philosophical and political points of view. Adolfo Colombres has compiled material from four different genres obtained in Buenos Aires province. They were published in *Literatura Popular Bonaerense* (2004). Claudia Briones has been working on politics, culture and identity. Some of her articles are: *Puertas abiertas, puertas cerradas. Algunas reflexiones sobre la identidad mapuche y la identidad nacional* (1988), *Weaving "the Mapuche People": The cultural politics of organizations with indigenous philosophy and leadership* (1999), *La ritualización como performance metadiscursiva entre organizaciones con filosofía y liderazgo mapuche* (2001) and *Cuestionando geografías estatales de inclusión en Argentina. La política cultural de organizaciones con filosofía y liderazgo Mapuche* (2006). In the last two decades, Lucía Golluscio has been writing on language, culture and identity. Among others, we can mention the following articles: *Educación e Identidad: los tayil Mapuches* (1992), *Los modos de hablar de los mapuches de la Argentina. ¿Discurso ritual o arte verbal?* (1994), *From secrecy to public performance. The political uses of Mapudungun* (2002) and her book *El Pueblo Mapuche: poéticas de pertenencia y devenir* (2006). Ana Ramos, Walter Delrio, Laura Kropff and Lorena Cañuqueo have worked on language and also literature.

Taking into account the research that has been done up to the present, We thought we could offer our own different insight using the material the above mentioned researchers have provided us with, collaborating thus with the diffusion of their work and making *Mapuche* literature known to more people.

The Hypothesis

We believe there is a *Mapuche* literary production which, though still not quite developed due to the varied difficulties these aborigines have had to face, shows the constituent traits of *Mapuche* identity.

The Objectives

The general objective of this thesis is to demonstrate that certain traits of *Mapuche* identity can still be found in their literary work. To prove it, we had to carry out some specific objectives:

- To study the identity and literature concepts.
- To explore the historical context, language, religion, tradition and concept of space these aborigines have.
- To read bibliography on *Mapuche* literature.
- To select, read and analyse texts written by the *Mapuche* in Argentina.

Methodology

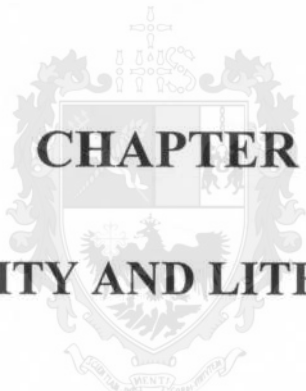
In order to prove our hypothesis, we set out to achieve the above mentioned objectives which implied we had to deal with a new concept of literature – the ethnic one. Here, the Chilean researchers helped us with their vast experience in studying and analyzing aborigines' texts. We had to resort to anthropology to try to understand the new ideas on identity and when and how the *Mapuche* appeared in our country would be explained by the history field. Anthropology also helped us

providing information about these aborigines' language, religion and tradition. The cultural context is absolutely necessary to understand these people and their message.

After the interdisciplinary research, we read bibliography on *Mapuche* literature produced mainly in our country and then, we selected, read and analyzed five texts from different genres for the purpose of getting a wider view of their production.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into four chapters preceded by a short introduction where the problem, a literary review, the hypothesis, the objectives, the methodology and the structure of the work are mentioned. In the first chapter, we explain the concepts of identity and literature since they are the backbones of this research. These definitions will give the theoretical framework necessary for its development. In the second chapter we trace the origin of the *Mapuche* people, their history, language, religion, tradition and notion of space as identity materializes in these areas. In the third chapter we comment on the 'white' man's influence on the above mentioned aspects as we think it indispensable to know the consequences of this two-race encounter in these aborigines' life. In the fourth chapter we analyze the selected literary texts taking into account the research previously done. Finally, we show the traits of identity reflected on their literary production and the final conclusion regarding the main theme of this thesis which is identity in the *Mapuche* literature. An appendix with *Mapuche* texts and a glossary which we believe could help the reader are incorporated at the end of this thesis.

The coat of arms of the Universidad del Salvador (USAL) is centered on the page. It features a shield with a cross at the top, a book in the center, and a sun at the bottom. The shield is flanked by two lions and a banner at the bottom with the text "USAL FUNDADA EN 1963".

CHAPTER I

IDENTITY AND LITERATURE

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1. IDENTITY

At a certain moment in their lives, human beings wonder who they are and where they come from. Sooner or later we start asking these questions and we do not give up until we get a satisfying answer. Not getting it would imply the appearance of conflicts. We are reflecting about our identity. We perceive it is a basic need such as love or food and if we do not satisfy these needs we might get ill, either spiritually or physically and even die³.

Identity has to do with our history; the place where we live; the people we deal with; our view of the world and others' and with different aspects of society. As we have already mentioned, we are going through a globalization era; a period which tends to homogenize rather than differentiate, in spite of that, we still go on asking the same questions as individuals and as a group. We look for personal and social identity though, at a certain point, they meet and mingle. We cannot exist alone. We are what we are because there are others who also are.

Apart from the relationship between the person and the group, we should also mention the relationship between one group and another and between one group and others. When one group states its own identity differentiating in this way from others, conflicts may be born. In order to strengthen its identity or because it feels in danger, one group may reject the other, subject it and even try to make it disappear. The attacked group starts to deny its own identity or to pretend they reject it in order to survive. This is what happened to *Mapuche* aborigines. In *Identidad y procesos de construcción de hegemonía. El caso mapuche de Colonia Cushamen*, a research project, Ana Ramos wrote while quoting Lucía Golluscio:

³ Erich Fromm, the famous psychologist, thought Identity is one of a person's needs. Erich FROMM, "Bases Filosóficas del Psicoanálisis", Erich Fromm Document Center, [electronic document], p.5, 1956, <http://www.erich-fromm.de/data/pdf/c-sp.pdf>. [2010].